



**STATE OF ARKANSAS  
ASA HUTCHINSON, GOVERNOR**

Arkansas Women's Commission  
Chair: Alison Williams, Chief of Staff to the Governor  
Meeting #5  
Arkansas State University-Mountain View  
June 16, 2022

Attendees In Person: Dr. Charisse Childers, Tamika Edwards, Beverly Morrow, Kathy White Loyd, Apprilla Porch, Maddie Spickard, Alison Williams

Virtual Attendees: Gayatri Agnew, Dr. Jones-Branch, Mellie Bridewell, Senator Joyce Elliott, Kim Lane, Heather Larkin, Auditor Andrea Lea, Verónikha Salazar, Lane Schmidt, Dr. Todd Shields, Kathy Webb, Naija White,

Absent: Senator Breanne Davis, Marie Holder

MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER AND WELCOME

- The Chair called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.
- The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming the Commissioners and Visitors and mentioning that meetings are open to the public and live streamed on YouTube and archived on our website.
- The Chair thanked Dr. Kathy White Loyd and Ms. Mollie Morgan for hosting the meeting in Mountain Home.
- Dr. White Loyd thanks Ms. Morgan, the Chancellor, and the tech staff for their help with hosting the meeting.
- The Chair mentioned that Marie Holder was unable to attend because of a personal emergency. The chair asked that we keep Marie in our prayers.
- The Chair mentioned that draft minutes were sent to the Commissioners last week for review.
  - Asked for a motion to adopt the minutes from the last meeting.
    - Dr. Charisse Childers motioned with Dr. Jones-Branch seconding.
  - Without objection minutes from May 13, 2022, meeting were adopted.
- The Chair asked if there was any old business to address.
- The Chair invited representatives from each of the subcommittees to update the Commission on their work since the last meeting.

## 2. REPORTS

- Research and Writing Committee – Dr. Cherisse Jones-Branch/Dr. Todd Shields
  - Dr. Jones Branch said that they met with people to talk about the PLC Evaluation design plan; very excited about the opportunity to work with them as they format the final plan
  - Dr. Todd Shields said that they were making good progress on updating the 2018 Women's Foundation report.
  - They are making great progress on getting the survey that they still hope to build this August and September.
    - Reminding the subcommittees that if they still have questions, be thinking about those.
  - The Chair stated that everyone has a copy via email an initial draft of the updates from the 2018 Women's Foundation Report.
- Barriers to Entry and Retention Committee – Dr. Kathy White Lloyd
  - The committee has worked on the agenda for today.
  - We have had calls with single mothers.
  - Had calls with counselors about barriers and a lot of the questions that you see in front of you.
- Impacts of Covid-19 Committee – Mellie Bridewell
  - Have met a couple of times this month.
  - Have had Carrie McClain from the National Health Association really dive into the Covid issue. As well as some of the barriers for women in rural health. We really enjoyed her talk, and it would be great to have her present to the whole commission.
  - We are trying to set up a neutral kind of workshop, what I would like to do is get together and really sit down and put a pencil and pen together to really kind of look at going through the template. And then, share a goggle doc with talking points to really to get the group starting to add to that.
  - We are getting there we got a lot of great information and distributing information.
  - The Covid information is coming in regularly, nationally as well.
- Family Caregiving Committee– Gayatri Agnew
  - Have had four different speakers come in and join them.
  - Have had the opportunity to learn quite a bit. Following the Early Learning Task Force; some of the findings in their research may be recommendations for this Commission's report
  - Two things have continued to come up, one is the lack of availability of infant care as a unique subset of overall childcare.
  - The second is the way we as a state think about access to quality childcare.
  - A few guest speakers and different experts and reports have highlighted that nuance that we are blessed in Arkansas to have availability to care, but when you add that level of quality there are some specific gaps there.
  - Our committee has been meeting in a working group style on a weekly basis, we are shifting to bi-weekly every other week.
  - We will have a guest speaker from Save The Children in next week on the 24<sup>th</sup> and we will continue that cadence until we get through our stakeholder speakers and insights that we want to surface.

- One piece of the puzzle that we have not be able to get to, and that is the non-childcare side of family care and so if any of the commissioners has recommendations of guest speakers we can invite in or stake holders we should be speaking to better understand, and care conditions for family care beyond childcare that would be helpful.
- The Chair noted for the subcommittees, as a reminder there is a template that Mellie put together that is guidance for how to submit research with your questions or things you want to submit to the research and writing committee for incorporation to the research and writing committee.
- The Chair asked if there were any questions for the subcommittees or their work.
  - Dr. Verónikha Salazar asked if the subcommittee for research and writing is thinking about the survey to have other language choices besides English.
  - The Chair stated that she saw Dr. Todd Shields shaking his head yes, he is the one developing and posting that survey.
  - The Chair asked Dr. Shields what other languages will the survey be posted in?
  - Dr. Shields stated that the survey will be translated into Spanish. Some other languages are being discussed. It will depend on the firm that we can get and how much they will charge us to translate to different languages.
- The next meeting would be in Pine Bluff, the location has changed. The chair is waiting to confirm the location. Please be on the look out for the more information.
- The Clinton School for Public Service jointly asked if they could provide the space for our final meeting in November.
  - The Chair is grateful to Dr. Jay Barth, Director of the Clinton Library and Dr. Victoria DeFrancesco Soto, who is the relatively new Dean of the Clinton School, and Stephanie Streett, Executive Director of The Clinton Foundation, on that collective outreach.
- The Chair is looking for recommendations on how to engage our military community here in this state. If any commissioners have ideas or recommendations for outreach, The Chair is happy to personally reach out to them as potential host or special guest.
- The Chair turned the meeting to Mollie Morgan to introduce speakers and special guests.

### 3. NEW BUSINESS

#### a. Single Mothers

- Ms. Morgan asked that some single mothers who are on the path to a successful financial and emotional, and every other kind of future to come forward.
  - Ms. Morgan asked the speakers take a few minutes to discuss their background, their home life. Who they are and what they are doing?
    - Single mothers
    - All in the LPN program at the University of Arkansas at Mountain Home.
    - All live in the area or have lived around Mountain Home their entire life.
- Ms. Morgan asked about some of the barriers the mothers have faced.
  - Children in different school districts and then having to drive back to Magnolia for school.
  - Working at night and not having access to childcare.
  - Programs that help with daily living needs
  - Knowledge of available scholarships.

- Scholarship limits
- Tuition covered but not rent, gas, and everyday expenses
- Access to loans to cover everyday expenses without having to have a co-signer
- Grants to help cover everyday expenses
- Ms. Morgan asked what the drive was to finish or further their education.
  - Their children
  - Self-motivated
  - Setting a good example for their children
- Ms. Morgan asked what steps the community and this Commission can take to make it easier for those that following your footsteps.
  - Resources for students who have been in domestic violence situations,
  - The ability to stay home with our children while also attending school.
  - The ability to apply for loans and financing that does not require a co-signer.
  - Dr. Loyd highlighted the story of a participant that was unable to understand. There was a copy at each place setting of this courageous woman's story.

b. Career Pathways Initiative

- Ms. Morgan introduced our next speaker who is from Career Pathways Initiative (CPI). CPI, helps single parents, both men and women, with financial access.
  - CPI is a federally funded program that is not only on the Mountain Home campus but Statewide. They only work with two-year universities. Funded by Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Not only do they support the women who provided experiences for the commission. They are currently serving on the Mountain Home Campus right above 100 students. Not only are they helping single moms, but they are also helping married moms, and both married and single dads.
  - They serve anyone who is below the 250% federal poverty guidelines.
  - About 45% of their students are single moms. 57% of that 45% are below that federal poverty line. That would put a family of between two to four below \$17,000 and \$26,000 a year.
  - They also assist these families with:
    - Transportation assistance
    - They are offered \$0.52 / mile from their home address to school and back home for the days that they are seated on campus. Those funds have recently this past year, started being directly deposited.
    - Some also receive checks.
    - Some receive gas cards.
    - Tuition/Book Assistance
    - Help with Course related supplies.
    - Childcare Assistance
    - Online Programs in which they are enrolled for five hours or more.
    - A program called EDpays. This program is to help students with any type of expense a student may have during the semester. To qualify you must be below the 150% poverty guideline. You must also be new to the Career Pathways program. The student receives a \$100.00 for signing up and \$300 mid-term if they maintain satisfactory grades. Upon submission of their final grades at the end of the year

they receive another \$300.00. They are eligible for this money the entire time they are enrolled. Upon completion their course they are given \$500.00. They can use these funds for anything.

- Ms. Morgan asked what other elements hold single mothers and fathers back?
  - Specifically in the Mountain Home area, healthcare options are limited.
    - Childcare
    - Very few accept infants, and children under the age of 3.
    - Hours of Centers
    - Voucher Acceptance
    - Single mom assistance in the state within one place

c. High School Counselors

- They introduced themselves and Ms. Morgan asked them what their best practices were?
  - A good partnership with ASU. Students stay in school because of all the offerings, i.e., the tech center, the nursing programs that they can do, and CNA programs. We also have a lot that we offer because we are a charter school, so we can do work study for our kids. They can work during the day and not have a full schedule if they have met all of their credit requirements for graduation.
  - Some students need help to support their whole family. We have work study programs for apprenticeships. They go and work for a company and then that turns into a full-time job after graduation.
- Ms. Morgan asked what barriers they saw that kept students from reaching out for post-secondary education? Also, what barriers cause students to drop out.
  - Lack of education at home.
  - Teen pregnancy
  - Statistics, if they have a failing grade in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, it's hard to stay on track. You are having to take that class again as a sophomore and you aren't taking the electives that you want to take so you are already behind.
  - Financial aid application. If there is no one to help get the application filled out, then they miss the chance.
  - Parents distrust of the application. They are not comfortable providing their personal information on the application and to their child.
  - The Chair asked what the graduation rate was? 90.8%
  - Mountain Home has started a night school option. Students that have dropped out are taking advantage of the night school program.
  - Ms. Morgan asked what would enable all students to be able to attend a post-secondary school.
  - Making help available to help them complete applications.
  - More programs with College Career Coaching Staff.
  - The paperwork involved.
  - Auditor Lea asked what trends the college counselors were seeing? And, if they are explaining the benefits of two-year and four-year education to rural kids, instead of just focusing on a four-year school. Both ways are listed with the Tech center.
  - With intern and apprenticeship programs if they just have a little bit of an interest in anything we have some fantastic facility that will point them in the right direction.

- The Chair asked how the Mountain Home Promise is funded?
  - The Promise scholarship is funded by the Mountain Home Education Foundation. They are a 501(c)(3) and all the money is contributed through community donations and endowments.
  - This scholarship pays the remaining tuition after all other grants and scholarships have been applied. The Promise does not include payment for fees, books, and supplies.

d. Hunger Barriers

- Ms. Morgan invited a recently graduated ASU student. The student spoke about the barrier of hunger in relation to post-secondary education.
  - One in every three college students in Arkansas is food insecure.
    - One in every three college students in Arkansas has gone to bed hungry.
    - 1/3 of students surveyed said that in the last 12 months they were worried that they would run out of food before they had money to buy more.
    - 1/3 said that skipped meals either sometime or often because there is not much money for food.
    - When students are hungry, they drop out of college.
    - The whole state suffers from food insecurity economically, socially, and psychologically.
    - When students are hungry, they have a harder time entering the workforce.
    - We cannot fill workforce positions if we cannot fill stomachs.
  - Programs around the state that fight against food insecurity.
    - Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance
    - The University of Arkansas at Fayetteville has started Razorback Food Recovery. They take leftovers from the dining hall, sort it and donate it to local non-profits.
    - There is also awareness being done by using Tic Tok and selling laptop stickers.

e. Remote Work

- Ms. Morgan invited a tax accountant to speak about remote work. The participant worked in the office for 80 plus hours a week
  - Covid caused the way they worked to change. They ended up working remotely for two years.
  - Worked from home her entire pregnancy and was able to return to work quicker.
  - The flexibility that came from working from home allowed her to take care of a newborn. She could get up early and work for a few hours and work late, and still be able to care for her baby.
  - Metrics were accessed because one departments work is based on another departments.
- Senator Elliott worked on the legislation to get passed to be sure schools could figure out different ways of delivering what students need, by deciding in their own communities. There is legislation on schools of innovation on the legislative website. Another piece of legislation that's out there, is a student reengagement act. Not a GED but a diploma.
- Question to the Single Mother Panel - There was a trend that they all were going though the nursing program, why was that a desirable goal as opposed to maybe doing something different?
  - Wanted to give back to the community.

- Trouble finding jobs without experience. Unless it is a family-owned company you won't get hired.
- Lots of areas of movement within the industry.
- In Northwest Arkansas Nursing is the big thing. There are nursing homes everywhere. There are clinics all up and down the streets.
- There is a demand for nurses.
- Being able to help people and be aware of my own health as well.
- Dr. Cherisse Jones-Branch asked how the pay in the Northwest part of the state compare to the cost of living in the area?
  - The pay is lower than other parts of the state and the community. Private companies and other entities that are not a part of the BRMC are paid higher. Their starting wages are higher.
  - If you work at BRMC their starting wage for an LPN is between \$17 & \$18 an hour. The surrounding nursing homes that private start you out at \$20 to \$22 an hour. This is still low for an LPN with your skill set. The cost of living continues to go up. The same expenses exist there as they do all over the state.
  - As a part time server one guest made more than LPNs in the area.
- Senator Elliott said that she was curious about the career pathway program. Is it in an overall way indexed to the cost of living? Regarding transportation there may be some indexing going on.
  - On the transportation specifically they are given the policies at the state level. The state level just recently bumped up to .52 cents. Initially we were at .42 cents. When gas prices started to climb, we were bumped up to .52 cent a mile. It maxes out at \$275 a month per student. No exact price on childcare, because each facility is different. It depends on if they are fulltime or parttime. Senator Elliot asked if that was adequate?
    - For the area that we live in it is difficult. Hoping that Career Pathways will be able to increase what we can give our students because it's just not enough.
- Dr. Charisse Childers asked the remote worker. Was it a challenge for you to find childcare?
  - With remote work, having kids when at home is as much as a safety issue for them
- The chair called out Kathy Webb, Director of the Arkansas Relief Alliance, and asked her what things from your perspective that you would really like for us and the Commission to take away from the remarks about food insecurity.
  - College Students are hungry.
  - There is an epidemic at the college level.
  - We are losing young women that could be going into the fields that we are talking about.
  - Inability to concentrate in class, skipping classes, and then sometimes those things snowball, and you end up dropping out.
  - A lot of the students who are most affected by this, are our first-generation students and a lot of those students are our minority students, and a lot of those students are females. It is an inequitable situation, and it is a real barrier to success for these young people moving forward.
- The Chair asked Dr. Salazar if she had commentary from Henderson State and what she sees in her community?
  - Seeing across the nation, received \$1,000 grant.

- Small food pantry at Henderson State University. The stigma is still attached to it.
- Chair came back to Ms. Webb, who has a taskforce on hunger, which is having several conversations with people who have funded successful grocery stores and food deserts in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Pennsylvania. Learning a lot; realize will have to have a variety of options available for people to solve the issue of food deserts.
- Dr. Charisse Childers said that approximately two years ago the Arkansas Department of Education put together a statewide resource portal. All divisions of the Department of Workforce Services have their information on this portal. It provides resources for childcare, transportation etc.
  - You can search by county or by region or category.
- The Chair personally thanked everyone on behalf of the commission.
  - The Chair thanks ASU-Mountain Home for hosting.
- The Chair adjourned the meeting at 2:32 pm.